

The science of corruption

Fighting corruption is not just good governance. It is self defence

SUBJECT OF THE DAY

SARMIN AKTHER

Corruption is an ongoing problem in Bangladesh. In all major rankings of the world, the country regularly finds itself among the most corrupt countries. It remained the most corrupt country consecutively for five years (2001-2005). Though the position has been moved up, the country is still in the lower end of the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) of Transparency International (TI). According to TI, Bangladesh ranked 17th, 15th, 13th, 14th, 16th and 13th in the CPI in 2017, 2016, 2015, 2014, 2013 and 2012 respectively. These data lead us to a biggest question: "What making people corrupt here?" Very little is written scientifically about it yet.

Reviewing the article of Dr. Khurshed Alam published on LSE blog helps us to find the answer. He pointed out that, as a country experiences growth, a sense of expectation also grows among some of its inhabitants which can result in increasing corruption. He terms this expectations "bulge hunger", where all those who control resources insists or allocate themselves greater rewards, usually at the expense of those who do not. When a country moves from poor to non-poor some of its inhabitants will inevitably change from 'needy' to 'greedy'. As more resources becomes available expectations grow, often much faster than the pace of change.

This is likely to take place in any developing country during the transitional period from poor to non-poor stage. Here we can draw on the case of Bangladesh as an example. After its independence in 1971, the economy of the country has been broken down because of wartime disruptions. There were critical shortages of food grains and other essentials. Majority of the people were living under poverty line. They used

to adopt unfair means or offer bribe to fulfill their fundamental needs. People's normative order was worn out. However, the story of economic crisis started to turning around in the early 1990s. Resources started to be available for the common people of the country more and more. But this availability of wealth led people to 'grand corruption'. The needy people have been turned into greedy and started looking to expand their portfolios.

and is carrying out a thorough probe into it. The higher amount of second home registration in Malaysia and Toronto over the past few years indicates the way where the money is going.

Poverty is not the only cause of corruption here. One more example is as much as necessary to well-built the argument. Previously, there was a high risk of corruption in the public sector as the civil servants were low paid for which it was difficult for

BDT 1,06,889 million. The perception of not receiving service without paying illegal money has worsened in two years' time from about 71 per cent in 2015 to 89 per cent in 2017. The TIB report mentioned that 89 per cent household of the bribe payee showed reason for paying bribe as 'service is not available if bribe not paid'— that means bribe collection is institutionalized to a certain extent.

Corruption is also common

rose by 17.3 percent over the last six years (2012-17). This indicates the growing sense of entitlement and expectations of reward among resource management groups. They want to accumulate more and more in order to be freed from their 'imaginary need' which chasing them away all the time. To them, corruption is 'a way of life'.

Some measures could be taken to bring change in this value system, for example, introducing fixed time



During this transitional period, all resource management groups—politicians, bureaucrats, businessmen, professionals, union leaders—had an interest in maintaining elements of the systems which they know they can exploit. For example, over the last two decades, land grabbing is the common practice among the powerful. They are occupying the land along river banks, disputed land, khas (government-owned) land or even parks and public spaces—often with the support of the power elites.

It is ordinary people who suffer as it is their money deposited in those banks. Moreover, Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit recently detected that the cases of money laundering involving Tk 4,000 crore

them to support their families. But in 2016, government raised their salaries by more than 100%. Moreover, bureaucrats made some changes in the government rules in the case of admissible benefits like travelling allowances and other remunerations for attending meetings, discharging official duties, etc. Perhaps it was hoped that by increasing the pecuniary benefits it would stop officials from seeking additional income.

But the percentage of bribe paying households has not decreased. The nation-wide household survey data of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) in 2017 shows that overall 66.5 per cent people are victims of corruption in the service sectors and the amount of bribe paid

among professionals like physicians, lawyers, engineers or school and college teachers. It is not a case of need, and many already held adequate assets. Most of them do not need money anymore but they cannot control themselves from these illegal benefits. All of their efforts are made basically to satisfy not their need but their greed what has been termed as 'bulge hunger' by Dr. Khurshed Alam. Hence the rich people of the country becoming richer. The country has been ranked as the fastest growing country in the world in terms of its increasing rich population, as per the World Ultra Wealth Report 2018 by WEALTH-X. The report shows the number of ultra-high net-worth (UHNW) individuals in Bangladesh

limits for service delivery, standardizing process in each sector and introducing e-tendering system; it could take a wealth statement of incoming workers and promote only the honest officers after proper certification from the service recipients. Also there is no dearth of government officials sitting less utilized or non-utilized. From them a group of people can be assigned for sectoral monitoring. Everyone should come forward to bring the country out from this endemic, as Joe Biden puts it, "Fighting corruption is not just good governance. Its self defense".

The writer is Research Officer, Bangladesh Institute of Social Research Trust. Email: akther.sarmin101@gamil.com.